

The Kingdom Of Heaven

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October 15, 2011

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Matt. 13:11

The general “theme” of this parable of Jesus was “the kingdom of heaven”.

Many of the parables start with “*The kingdom of heaven is like...*”

- Matt. 13:24, “*Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field.*”
- Matt. 13:31, “*Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field.*”
- Matt. 13:33, “*Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.*”
- Matt. 13:44-45, “*Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls.*”
- Matt. 13:47, “*Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind.*”

In explaining why He spoke in parables, Jesus made reference to “the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven”.

Matt. 13:11, “*He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.*”

We also note that “*the kingdom of heaven*” was the theme of...

Jesus’ itinerant ministry.

- Matt. 4:17, “*From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*”

- Matt. 4:23, “*And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.*”

His sermon on the mount.

- Matt. 5:3, “*Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*”
- Matt. 5:10, “*Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*”
- Matt. 5:19-20, “*Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.*”
- Matt. 5:33, “*Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths:”*
- Matt. 6:10, “*Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.*”
- Matt. 7:21, “*Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.*”

Because “*the kingdom of heaven*” is such a prominent subject in the parables of Jesus (as well as His overall preaching)...

It might serve a good purpose to preface our study of the parables with a careful look at what “*the kingdom of heaven*” means.

With a proper definition of “*the kingdom of heaven*” fresh in our minds, we are more likely to benefit from our Lord’s teaching on this wonderful subject!

Let’s begin our effort to define “*the kingdom of heaven*” by comparing it with “*the kingdom of God*”.

The “*kingdom of heaven*” vs. “*the kingdom of God*”.

Is there a difference?

There are some who try to make a distinction, but a quick comparison of the gospels indicate that the terms refer to the same thing.

- Matt. 4:17 with Mark 1:14-15.
- Matt. 4:17, “*From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*”
- Mark 1:14-15, “*Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.*”
- Matt. 5:3 with Luke 6:20.
- Matt. 5:3, “*Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*”
- Luke 6:20, “*And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God.*”
- Matt. 13:31 with Mark 4:30-31.
- Matt. 13:31, “*Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field.*”
- Mark 4:30-31, “*And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth.*”

Why the different expressions?

We find that Matthew used the expression “*kingdom of heaven*” almost exclusively, while the other gospel writers used the phrase “*kingdom of God*”.

It may be that since Matthew wrote his gospel to the Jews, he chose to use the phrase “*kingdom of heaven*” because of the Jews’ misconception of the coming kingdom.

Many anticipated a physical kingdom.

The expression “*heaven*” (literally, “*heavens*”) emphasizes a spiritual kingdom.

So our first observation is that any effort to distinguish between the “*kingdom of heaven*” and the “*kingdom of God*” is really without warrant.

Let’s now consider what Jesus meant when He spoke of the “kingdom of heaven”.

It involves four inter-related concepts.

God reigns.

It is spiritual in nature; it is visibly manifested today in the Lord’s church; and it is referred to as both present and future.

The term “*kingdom*” as used by the Jews often stressed the idea of “reign” or “dominion”, not some geographical area surrounded by physical boundaries.

It is used this way by Jesus in Matt. 6:10.

Matt. 6:10, “*Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.*”

Thus, the “*kingdom of heaven*” (or “*kingdom of God*”) is wherever the “reign” or “dominion” of God (who is in heaven) is manifested.

In one sense, the kingdom of God has always existed.

- Psalms 47:2, “*For the LORD most high is terrible; he is a great King over all the earth.*”
- Psalms 103:19, “*The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all.*”

But in a special way the rule or reign of God was to be manifested with the coming of Christ.

As foretold in the time of Daniel (~500 B.C.).

Dan. 2:44-45, “*And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure.*”

As proclaimed by John the Baptist.

Matt. 3:1-3, *“In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.”*

As preached by Jesus.

- Matt. 4:17, *“From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*
- Mark 1:14-15, *“Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.”*

Indeed, it is in the Person of Jesus Christ that the “reign of God” is being manifest today.

- 1 Cor. 15:23-26, *“But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.”*
- Eph. 1:20-22, *“Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church,”*
- 1 Pet. 3:22, *“Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.”*
- Rev. 1:5, *“And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,”*

It is spiritual in nature.

The kingdom (or reign of God) would not be found in the form of a physical kingdom.

John 18:36, *“Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.”*

It would manifest itself in spiritual ways.

Rom. 14:17, *“For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.”*

It is visibly manifested today in the Lord’s church.

What is the Lord’s church?

It is a community of souls in whose hearts God is recognized as Sovereign.

That the terms “*church*” and “*kingdom*” can be used interchangeably, consider:

How “*church*” and “*kingdom*” were used by Jesus.

Matt. 16:18, *“And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”*

Comments made to those who were in the church.

- Col. 1:13, *“Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.”*
- 1 Thess. 2:12, *“That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.”*

The description of those in the churches of Asia.

- Rev. 1:4, *“John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne,”*
- Rev. 1:6, *“And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”*
- Rev. 1:9, *“I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.”*

It is referred to as both present and future.

The “kingdom of heaven” has a future element as well as a present one.

Its future aspect is spoken of by:

Jesus.

Matt. 25:34, *“Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”*

Paul.

- 1 Cor. 15:50, *“Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.”*
- 2 Tim. 4:18, *“And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”*

Peter.

2 Pet. 1:10-11, *“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”*

Peter described the coming of its future state.

2 Pet. 3:10-13, *“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”*

Therefore the “kingdom of heaven” involves the “new heavens and new earth”.

These four concepts or elements must be kept in mind whenever we think of the “kingdom of heaven”. Failure to remember all four can easily lead to misconceptions about the nature of the kingdom.

In an effort to clarify this subject even further, consider...

A summary definition of the “*kingdom of heaven*”.

In the present sense.

It is found wherever the sovereignty of God is accepted in the hearts of men. It is a spiritual kingdom, for God rules in the hearts of men. Its outward manifestation today is the Lord’s church.

The kingdom was inaugurated on the Day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts.

Acts 2:36, “*Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made the same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.*”

In the future sense.

The kingdom will reach its highest point with the coming of the Lord.

- 1 Cor. 15:24, “*Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power.*”
- Matt. 13:43, “*Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.*”

It will be that “*new heavens and new earth*” described by Peter and John.

- 2 Pet. 3:13, “*Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.*”
- Rev. 21:3, “*And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.*”

It will be experienced only by those in the church who are submitting to God’s will.

Those who do “the will of My Father in heaven”.

Matt. 7:21-23, “*Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*”

Those who are “diligent to be found by Him in peace”

2 Pet. 3:13-15, *“Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless. And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you,”*

Conclusion.

As we get into the parables of Jesus, we will find many references to the “kingdom of heaven”.

Sometimes it appears Jesus refers to the “present” aspect of the kingdom. At other times He has reference to the “future” aspect of the kingdom.

Hopefully, this effort to define “*the kingdom of heaven*” will help us appreciate more what Jesus has to say concerning “*the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven*”!

One principle concerning entering the kingdom that was a mystery to Nicodemus at first was the need to be born again. But then Jesus explained that the new birth was one of water and the Spirit.

John 3:3-5, *“Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”*

Is that still a mystery to you? Then consider Acts 2:38 and Titus 3:5.

- Acts 2:38, *“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”*
- Titus 3:5, *“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;”*

